DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 194 438 SO 012 986

AUTHOR Morrissett, Irving
TITLE Comments on "The NCSS Essentials of the Social Studies Statement and the Issue of Scope and Sequence". Vital Issues Session No. 12.
PUB DATE 28 Nov 80
NOTE 12p.: Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the National Council for the Social Studies (New Orleans, LA, November 28, 1980).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Citizen Participation: *Citizenship Education: Citizenship Responsibility: Content Analysis: *Educational Assessment: *Educational Needs: *Educational Objectives: Educational Practices: Elementary Secondary Education: Opinion Papers: *Social Studies

ABSTRACT

This paper presents comments on the recent statement "Essentials of Social Studies" which was written by the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS). The statement gives the impression that the dominant purpose of social studies is to prepare students to be altruistic participants in public life. The major criticism of this objective is that it fails to relate these educational goals (knowledge, skills, values, and social participation identified as relevant to the social studies) to aspects of a student's present or future life other than public participation. Further, if citizenship (and the corresponding rhetoric of citizenship) were actually the sole or major goal of social studies, it could be expected that public participation goals would permeate the products by which social studies are implemented. Review of the literature (guides produced by state and local educational agencies, social studies methods textbooks, and textbooks used in the schools) indicates that this is not the case. Rather, a literature review indicated that guides and methods texts were extremely varied in emphasis on citizenship as the sole or major goal for social studies and that although social studies textbooks do sometimes state citizenship as a goal, they seldom explain the relationship of the subject matter of the text to citizenship. In addition, citizenship as a goal of social studies is seldom mentioned in classrooms. The conclusion is that proponents of citizenship education, including the authors of the NCSS statement of purpose, will better answer educational needs in the field of social studies if they tame their rhetoric, set more modest goals, and share the stage with other goals. A copy of the NCSS goal statement concludes the document. (Author/DB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Irving Morrissett

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

ED194438

Comments on

"The NCSS Essentials of the Social Studies Statement and the Issue of Scope and Sequence"

Vital Issues Session #12

Sponsored by CUFA and NCSS at annual conference of the National Council for the Social Studies at New Orleans, Louisiana, November 28, 1980

by Irving Morrissett

SO 012 986

My comments here grow out of my work during the last two years with Project SPAN, but I cannot say that they represent the results of that Project, since the staff and consultants of the project have opened up many questions and reached consensus only on some. So these comments are my own.

My own work with various groups, including Project SPAN, has given me a full appreciation of the difficulties of getting any group to reach consensus on important issues, except at very high levels of abstration. So I am sympathetic with the extensive and prolonged work by many groups and individuals that has gone into this effort to create an incisive statement of purpose around which social studies educators can rally. I wish I could rally, but I can't.

In my view, this "Essentials" statement is a step backward from some previous NCSS statements of purpose. I will try to show you why I think this.

The main fault of the document I shall refer to as "the rhetoric of citizenship." Like many other statements about social studies, this state-

ment gives the impression that the dominant purpose--perhaps even the sole purpose--of social studies is to prepare students to be altruistic participants in public life:

> ...help prepare young people who can identify, understand, and work to solve the problems that face our increasingly diverse nation and interdependent world.
>
> ...lead to citizenship participation in public affairs.
>
> ...understanding of and commitment to democratic principles and their application.
>
> As a civic participant, the individual uses the knowledge, beliefs, and skills....
>
> ...understand the sweep of human affairs.
>
> ...the will to take part in public affairs.
>
> ...a thoughtful consideration of issues.
>
> ...the merit of taking part in public life.
>
> ...recommit ourselves as a nation to strong education for civic responsibility.

The document discusses the kinds of knowledge, skills, values, and social participation that are relevant to social studies, but there is virtually no indication that these educational goals are useful for any other purpose than altruistic participation in public life. Knowledge and skills are to prepare students for participation in public life. The sole reason for the development of a high level of morality is so that students will participate generously and altruistically in public life. If there are any spinoffs from these educational goals that might make more effective those aspects of social life that occupy 95-plus percent of a student's life now and in the future, that must be inferred.

If citizenship were actually the sole or major goal of social studies, one would expect this goal to permeate the products by which social studies are implemented--the many guides produced by state and local educational agencies, the social studies methods textbooks, and the textbooks used in the schools. Such is not the case. One would also expect that the content

of these products would be clearly related to the goal of citizenship. Neither is this the case. Let me state these relationship, or lack of relationships, as a series of propositions.

1.0 Propositions concerning state and local social studies guides.

1.1 Some guides give citizenship as the sole or major goal for social studies; others give citizenship a minor role among goals, or do not mention it.

1.2 Guides can be very similar to each other, whether or not they give a prominent place to the goal of citizenship. Conversely, differences among guides are generally not attributable to whether or not they give a prominent place to the goal of citizenship. (While this proposition accords with my observations, a substantial study would be required to demonstrate it conclusively.)

2.0 Propositions concerning social studies methods texts.

2.1 Some methods books give citizenship a prominent place as a goal of citizenship; some do not.

2.2 Methods books can be very similar to each other, whether or not they give a prominent place to the goal of citizenship. Conversely, differences among methods texts are generally not attributable to whether or not they give a prominent place to the goal of citizenship. (As with proposition 1.2 above, this proposition accords with my observations, but a substantial study would be required to prove its truth or falsity.)

3.0 Propositions concerning social studies textbooks.

3.1 Social studies texts have little relationship to state and local guides and to social studies methods texts, unless those guides or methods texts have been tailored to fit the dominant curriculum pattern and teaching methods of the existing classroom texts.

3.2 While some teachers' guides to texts emphasize citizenship as a major goal of social studies, the corresponding texts say little to students about the goal of citizenship.

3.3 If citizenship is stated as a goal in a social studies text, seldom is the relationship of the subject matter of the text to citizenship explained to the students.

4.0 Propositions concerning social studies classes.

4.1 Citizenship as a goal of social studies is seldom mentioned in classrooms.

4.2 When and if citizenship as a goal of social studies is mentioned in a classroom, very little effort is made to relate the particular subject matter of the course to the goal of citizenship.

4.3 If students were asked to state the goal or goals of their social studies classes, they would seldom mention citizenship unless they had been coached to do so. In any case, they would have difficulty in relating what they have learned in social studies classes to the goal of citizenship.

Of course, all of these lacks in the relationship of the rhetoric of citizenship to the reality of the products and processes of social studies education may be taken, by the proponents of citizenship as the sole or major goal of social studies, as a reason for dispair and/or redoubled efforts to sell citizenship. There is another possibility--that social studies educators, while not resisting head-on the rhetoric of citizenship, are unlikely to buy citizenship as the sole or major goal of social studies because they see other very important goals to be attained. This is not to imply that there is an organized, articulated alternative statement of a major goal or

goals. Such an alternative statement might or might not be desirable and possible. Efforts to make such an alternative statement have probably been stifled by the rhetoric of citizenship, which is surrounded by the aura of the flag, apple pie, and the emperor's new clothes.

The 1979 NCSS Social Studies Curriculum Guidelines present a useful set of goals and objectives, superior in my view to the "Essentials" statement. While the Guidelines begin with the rhetoric of citizenship, the specific goals and objectives are more generally applicable to the whole range of the social studies curriculum. The Guidelines, like the "Essentials," suffer from a lack of realism with respect to certain goals and processes that are well-nigh impossible in the typical school system--such as dealing with the full range of social realities and learning from experiences outside the classroom. But perhaps there is no obligation, in a statement of high-level goals, to recognize the great difficulties that might attend some of the goals.

One purpose of the "Essentials" statement, I presume, is to have a briefer, more incisive, statement of social studies objectives than is given by the Guidelines. In the process of distillation to construct the "Essentials" statement, the rhetoric of citizenship has been retained and enhanced, leaving out many "essentials" contained in the Guidelines.

If the purpose is to have a briefer statement of goals and objectives, NCSS would do well to go back to its 1974 publication, "A Parent's Guide to the Social Studies." This publication presents a simple, readable, believable statement of what social studies is about, relating it to

1. The relationships of human beings to the world in which we live.
2. The relationships of human beings to other human beings.
3. The relationships of human beings to themselves.

While the study of these relationships has some implications for citizenship education, a very much broader view of social studies is presented than is contained in the current rhetoric of citizenship. Citizenship is mentioned in this publication, but only twice, in the context of many other goals. One of those goals is to assist students to "live productive and satisfying lives," a goal that is completely lost in the rhetoric of citizenship. At the risk of sounding completely old-fashioned, I would like to see some attention given to the 50-year-old goal of Charles Beard for social studies education--the development of "rich and many-sided personalities (that) are informed about a wide range of affairs, both immediate and remote."[1] This goal is not incompatible with a citizenship goal, but it does not make citizenship the centerpiece, crowding out all others.

I hope that all of this does not give the impression that I am not in favor of helping young people to be "humane, rational, participating citizens," in the opening words of the 1979 NCSS Guidelines. I am very much in favor of assisting young people to be humane and rational, for a number of reasons, including but not limited to the purpose of being constructive participating citizens. But the rhetoric of citizenship overreaches itself, perhaps thus accounting in part for the failure of citizenship, construed as altruistic participation in public affairs, to have more than a minimal effect on the products and processes of social studies education.

The proponents of citizenship education would do well to tame their rhetoric, set more modest goals, and share the stage with other goals. In so doing, it is quite possible that they could make citizenship education more effective than it is at present. There are many excellent guides to

---

1. Charles A. Beard, A Charter for the Social Sciences (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1932), p. 97.

citizenship education, including the 1977 NCSS Bulletin, the 1977 Danforth-Kettering volume, the 1979 ASCD Handbook by Richard Remy, and numerous publications of Fred Newmann. There is a big task to be done in bringing the ideas of these volumes into a realistic relationship with the school curriculum. A redirection of the energy that goes into the rhetoric of citizenship might be of great benefit to social studies education.

National Council for the Social Studies

ESSENTIALS OF THE SOCIAL STUDIES

"If a nation expects to be ignorant and free in a state of civilization, it expects what never was and never will be."

-Thomas Jefferson

Citizen participation in public life is essential to the health of our democratic system. Effective social studies programs help prepare young people who can identify, understand and work to solve the problems that face our increasingly diverse nation and interdependent world. Organized according to a professionally disigned scope and sequence, such programs:

1. Begin in pre-school and continue throughout formal education and include a range of related electives at the secondary level.
2. Foster individual and cultural identity.
3. Include observation of and participation in the school and community as part of the curriculum.
4. Deal with critical issues and the world as it really is.
5. Prepare students to make decisions based on American principles.
6. Demand high standards of performance and measure student success by means that require more than the memorization of information.
7. Depend on innovative teachers broadly prepared in history, the humanitites, the social sciences, educational theory and practice.
8. Involve community members as resources for program development and student involvement.
9. Lead to citizenship participation in public affairs.

In 1979, the National Council for the Social Studies joined with eleven other professional associations to reaffirm the value of a balanced education.* We now enumerate the essentials of exemplary social studies programs. Such programs contribute not only to the development of students' capacity to read and compute, but also link knowledge and skills with an understanding of and commitment to democratic principles and their application.

Knowledge

Students need knowledge of the world at large and the world at hand, the world of individuals and the world of institutions, the world past, the world present and future. An exemplary social studies curriculum links information presented in the classroom with experiences gained by students through social and civic observation, analysis and participation.

Classroom instruction which relates content to information drawn from the media and from experience focuses on the following areas of knowledge:

- History and culture of our nation and the world.
- Geography—physical, political, cultural and economic.
- Government—theories, systems, structures and processes.
- Economics—theories, systems, structures and processes.
- Social institutions—the individual, the group, the community and the society.
- Intergroup and interpersonal relationships.
- World-wide relationships of all sorts between and among nations, races, cultures and institutions.

From this knowledge base, exemplary programs teach skills, concepts and generalizations that can help students understand the sweep of human affairs and ways of managing conflict consistent with democratic procedures.

Democratic Beliefs

Fundamental beliefs drawn from the Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution with its Bill of Rights form the basic principles of our democratic constitutional order. Exemplary school programs do not indoctrinate students to accept these ideas blindly, but present knowledge about their historical derivation and contemporary application essential to understanding our society and its institutions. Not only should such ideas be discussed as they relate to the curriculum and to current affairs, they should also be mirrored by teachers in their classrooms and embodied in the school's daily operations.

These democratic beliefs depend upon such practices as due process, equal protection and civic participation, and are rooted in the concepts of:

- Justice
- Equality
- Responsibility
- Freedom
- Diversity
- Privacy

Thinking Skills

It is important that students connect knowledge with beliefs and action. To do that, thinking skills can be developed through constant systematic practice throughout the years of formal schooling. Fundamental to the goals of social studies education are those skills which help assure rational behavior in social settings.

In addition to strengthening reading and computation, there are a wide variety of thinking skills essential to the social studies which can be grouped into four major categories:

- *Data Gathering Skills.* Learning to:
  - Acquire information by observation
  - Locate information from a variety of sources
  - Compile, organize, and evaluate information
  - Extract and interpret information
  - Communicate orally and in writing
- *Intellectual Skills.* Learning to:
  - Compare things, ideas, events, and situations on the basis of similarities and differences
  - Classify or group items in categories
  - Ask appropriate and searching questions
  - Draw conclusions or inferences from evidence
  - Arrive at general ideas
  - Make sensible predictions from generalizations

- *Decision Making Skills.* Learning to:
  Consider alternative solutions
  Consider the consequences of each solution
  Make decisions and justify them in relationship to democratic principles
  Act, based on those decisions
- *Interpersonal Skills.* Learning to:
  See things from the point of view of others
  Understand one's own beliefs, feelings, abilities, and shortcomings and how they affect relations with others
  Use group generalizations without stereotyping and arbitrarily classifying individuals
  Recognize value in individuals different from one's self and groups different from one's own
  Work effectively with others as a group member
  Give and receive constructive criticism
  Accept responsibility and respect the rights and property of others

Participation Skills

As a civic participant, the individual uses the knowledge, beliefs, and skills learned in the school, the social studies classroom, the community, and the family as the basis for action.

Connecting the classroom with the community provides many opportunities for students to learn the basic skills of participation, from observation to advocacy. To teach participation, social studies programs need to emphasize the following kinds of skills:

Work effectively in groups—organizing, planning, making decisions, taking action
Form coalitions of interest with other groups
Persuade, compromise, bargain
Practice patience and perseverance in working for one's goal
Develop experience in cross-cultural situations

Civic Action

Social studies programs which combine the acquisition of knowledge and skills with an understanding of the application of democratic beliefs to life through practice at social participation represent an ideal professional standard. Working to achieve that ideal is vital to the future of our society. However, even if excellent programs of social studies education were in place, there would often remain a missing element—the will to take part in public affairs. Formal education led by creative and humane teachers can provide the knowledge, the tools, the commitment for a thoughtful consideration of issues and can even stimulate the desire to be active. But to achieve full participation, our diverse society must value and model involvement to emphasize for young people the merit of taking part in public life.

As we approach the bicentennial of our Constitution and Bill of Rights, is it not time for us to recommit ourselves as a nation to strong education for civic responsibility?

* Essentials of Education Statement, Washington, D.C. 1980

For more specific information regarding the development of exemplary programs or for copies of the Essentials of the Social Studies and/or the Essentials of Education statement, write or call:

National Council for the Social Studies
3615 Wisconsin Avenue, N.W.
Washington D.C. 20016

(202) 966-7840